

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 23, 1899, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. 1331 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C. May 23rd 1899. Dear Alec:

I have only time for a few words to supplement my telegram this evening. I have been feeling a good deal troubled about your work for sometime past, and I have no doubt that you do "wish McCurdy would come soon." But unless the matter for which you want him is as important to you as this is to him, and you can get no one else to take his place, I do think it would be awfully hard to make him drop everything now. For the first time since he came to us I feel that he has something that is not only immediately valuable, and ready for sale, but something from which he should realize a large fortune. As I wrote you Sunday the last blemish has been removed from his box-developed films and he need not fear comparison with any ordinary developed negatives. He has improved the apparatus so that it is very simple and can be very cheaply made. It fills a very great want, a want the importance of which I know by my own experience. Nowadays no traveler thinks of taking a journey without his camera, but the great vexation always has been the difficulty of developing the pictures, it is so hard to get a light room when traveling. Now if we had had his box in Japan we could have taken a film in a few minutes, gone home and developed it in a few more minutes without any trouble; and then if necessary returned and taken some more photographs. As it was we had to trust to luck that our photographs came out at all and trust to luck that the photographer would know his business. I 2 lost a lot of my pictures from these two causes which with Mr. McCurdy's box would have been preventable. Now my experience is the experience of all who own cameras, and that has come to mean pretty nearly every third person. Mr. Dodge and the Examiner says Mr. McCurdy's patent is a very broad one, and the ground was entirely uncovered before. The apparatus is therefore now ready to be made for sale, the season of its greatest

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demand is just commencing, the patent is secured; it only remains to take the next step, have the apparatus made and negotiate for its being put on the market immediately to take advantage of a cease-time that won't come again for another year. Don't you think it would be very hard if you stopped all this? Of course Mr. McCurdy is your secretary, and he recognizes this, and says he is willing to sacrifice everything if you still think he ought to come after you understand affairs. I think the position is entirely different now from what it ever was before. Map type was not perfect, the gate was not so easily marketable or valuable, but this is a perfect thing, very valuable, and with a market waiting. Every one who has seen it is enthusiastic, and Mr. McCurdy has had a great many orders. I feel however that your work is important, and you must not be left in the lurch, so I want to send you up a clever young stenographer and it seems to me his ability to take down all you say without delay might counterbalance Mr. McCurdy's experience. Miss Tarbel's young man could go up immediately, or some one from here. Please telegraph as I feel a good deal troubled. I do not want you to suffer, and yet do not want Mr. McCurdy to lose the chance of his lifetime. He is no longer very young, and he has his family to look after. He has been waiting here to get 3 his films perfect, this he succeeded in doing Sunday, but he thought celluloid would be easier to work with than rubber, so he has been waiting to have that put in before going to Philadelphia to place the order for the boxes. He expected it from New York this morning, if it comes tomorrow he will go on to Philadelphia. It's half after one, you see I am anxious about this thing to sit up so late when I am tired and hoped to be in bed by eleven.

Lovingly, Mabel. I have always had faith in the map type and gate, but I have never felt that they were in such condition that a few weeks' delay would make such difference. I feel it would now.